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## *Soccer ball donation scores goal with Iraqi youth*

By John Connor  
Gulf Region South District



Colonels Jack Drolet, left, and Steve Hill, pose with a group of Iraqi boys before giving out donated soccer balls. Drolet is the incoming Gulf Region South commander on a pre-deployment site survey. Hill is the current commander of the GRS district responsible for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects in southern Iraq. (USACE photo)

Many new soccer balls are being booted around the playing fields of southern Iraq, thanks to the J. Frank Hillyard Middle School in Broadway, Va.

Broadway, a town of about 3,200 nestled in the historic Shenandoah Valley, is a far piece from Iraq. But the students and

faculty at the JFH Middle School there helped bridge the gap by sending 125 spanking new soccer balls to be enjoyed by Iraqi children and to support the Iraq reconstruction mission of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The initiative was conceived and spearheaded by JFH Middle School Math Teacher Denise Hill, whose brother, Col. Stephen Hill, is the commanding officer of USACE's Gulf Region South district in Iraq. GRS, part of the USACE Gulf Region Division, is responsible for reconstruction work in the nine southern provinces of Iraq.

Members of the GRS team, as well as USACE personnel elsewhere in Iraq, have grown accustomed to doing more than just overseeing the construction of billions of dollars of facilities for the Iraqi people.

GRS folks over the past several years have collected and donated to Iraqis such things as shoes, clothing, classroom supplies and sports equipment, with the emphasis on helping children.

"Delivery of these items in concert with our project visits seems to have a real positive impact," said Col. Hill.

USACE is managing the construction of a host of public facilities in Iraq, including water works, hospitals, sewer projects, roads and bridges. And USACE personnel regularly visit project sites to assure the quality of the work, most of which is being done these days by Iraqi contractors.

Maj. Edward Wright, the S-3 operations officer at GRS and a 28-year veteran of the teacher/coaching profession in Mississippi, said, "When I was a kid, if someone gave me a new ball, they had a friend for life.

"I don't suppose these guys are much different," added Wright, who is known as "Coach." Right you are, Coach.

An Iraqi serving as an interpreter with Coalition forces recalled the role of soccer balls in his childhood: "Each neighborhood had a lucky kid or two who owned a ball. They'd have it with them at all times. Kids would show up before school to get in a quick game. Lunch was eaten in about fifteen seconds so the rest of the break could be spent playing. Instead of rushing home from school, the boys would hang around an extra hour or two to play the day's last game.

"When a ball wasn't available--more often than not because the kid who

owned it got in trouble for not doing his chores--anything found would suffice," he continued. "One great game, I'll never forget, with the intensity of a World Cup match, was played with an empty orange juice container."

Denise Hill asked her brother, the colonel, some months ago what he could use and he said "soccer balls."

Doug Alderfer, the principal at the middle school, quickly got behind the idea and the students and teachers set the goal of raising enough money to buy and ship 50 soccer balls.



Col. Steve Hill hands out one of 125 donated soccer balls to youth in southern Iraq. (USACE photo)

They easily surpassed that goal, coming up with 125 balls, with a welcome assist in the way of reduced prices from Billy Kingsley, owner of Upper 90 Soccer in nearby Harrisonburg, Va.

Alderfer said Kingsley provided the balls at the wholesale price of \$15 a ball, down from the retail price of \$45. He said the students and faculty raised almost \$2,000 to purchase and ship the balls.

"It is clear from my ten months in Iraq that the effort of the students of JFH Middle School directly contributed to our mission here in three ways," said Col. Hill. "It

showed the children of Iraq that we care about them, made the project sites safer as parents saw the soccer balls given to their children, and provided a chance for the JFH Middle School children to make a very valuable contribution.

"What a great effort of kindness and support," added Col. Hill, who extended his thanks to Principal Alderfer, his sister Denise, Upper 90 Soccer Owner Kingsley, and to "the super students" of JFH Middle School for "contributing to the Army Corps of Engineers reconstruction effort in Iraq."



Youth with Soccer Ball.jpg: A boy outside a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project site in southern Iraq poses with his new soccer ball. (USACE photo)

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